

TESTIMONY OF
THE CONNECTICUT COALITION OF PROPERTY OWNERS

RE: SB 190 AAC THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LANDLORDS AND TENANTS
REGARDING BED BUG INFESTATION

BEFORE THE LEGISLATURE'S HOUSING COMMITTEE
10:00 AM, THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2012
ROOM 2A LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING

Good morning. My name is John P. Souza. For 24 years I have been a landlord and property owner. I also serve as the Treasurer of the Connecticut Coalition of Property Owners (CCOPO). CCOPO is the largest landlord property owners association in Connecticut. We have chapters in Hartford, Bridgeport, Stamford and also the CT Association of Real Estate Investors. Collectively our members own approximately 20,000 rental units throughout Connecticut.

Both CCOPO and I strongly oppose SB 190.

The thought of biting insects in your bed is quite disturbing, and now for unknown reasons bed bugs have made a reappearance in America, forcing everyone to deal with the problem. Neither tenants nor landlords want to deal with the prospect of an infestation, but like most "new problems," the unknown is the most troubling part. As awareness and understanding of the problem increase and common sense solutions are developed, everyone will benefit.

For the first 20 years of my career I never gave one thought to a bed bug, now for the last several years I have been dealing with this "new problem". I spent many hours researching the issue. Now my first job for every new case is to educate the tenant on ways to combat the pests, and keep them from spreading.

There are many low cost consumer products available to help combat the bugs at home depot, consumer stores and on line. Armed with this knowledge and a little guidance from me, my tenants have alleviated the problem quickly and often with costs of less than \$100. When I educate the tenant, I empower them to help themselves, and alleviate the fear of the unknown which is the largest hurdle to eradicating these pests. The large majority of cases have been resolved *without* the help of a professional exterminator.

Keep in mind that these pests don't come into the apartment on their own. A tenant has to bring them into the building by their own actions. As a landlord I can inform and educate tenants, but I can't be held responsible for every thing that happens in the building. If the state would like to create an informative web site and an advertising campaign to promote awareness, tenants will be better able to address the problem.

Specific Response to proposed legislation.

1(b) If I treat the unit properly several times as required, that should be the end of my responsibility.

1(c) Prospective tenants may not tell me the truth, if they are fleeing an infestation at another apartment.

1(d) (1) Why does this automatically become my problem? If the tenant moves in and the next day reports that they have bed bugs, why should I be responsible? If they collect used furniture off the street or from yard sales, I shouldn't be the one who has to pay to solve the problem? How is that fair? Why doesn't the tenant have to be responsible for the costs? What if tenant is sensitive to chemical pesticides and will only allow a more expensive non-chemical treatment?

1(d) 2 why should I abate the rent when I'm not the one who brought the bugs into the unit. The bank is not going to abate my payments, and the city is not going to abate my taxes due, nor is the insurance company going to abate my payments? Etc...

1(d) (3) I'm not a bank. I have enough to do trying to collect the rent. Why should I be forced to loan the tenants the money? If you believe that the tenants should be loaned money, why shift that burden to me? I didn't bring the problem into the building.

1(e) 1 & 1(e) 2 both of these "remedies" require money and resources that would be better spent elsewhere.

I work very hard to be a responsible landlord. I work with my tenants to provide a good place to live. But please recognize that with my increased costs, this is one more burden and it is for something that I didn't cause. My taxes, utilities, fuel and many other costs are going up. This is one more.

Think of what you are doing to the retired couple that relies on the income from a two or three family building to live on. Every time you increase their costs, you make it harder for them to pay their own bills.

I am not unsympathetic to my tenants. That is why I work hard with them. But I shouldn't have to pay for something that they caused. **Please do not pass SB 190.**

This completes my testimony. Thank you for your consideration.